

# Grief Notes

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## Surviving the holidays: help and hope for the holiday season

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With the holidays just around the corner, are you wondering how you will survive? Are you dreading them, knowing that everything has changed and that happy memories from past years can't be recreated? Despite what most people think, not everyone looks forward to the holidays. Losing someone through death may create dread as the holiday season approaches. This is often the case for the bereaved as holidays tend to magnify the feelings of loss. It is important and quite natural to experience the sadness especially felt at this time of year.



Whatever your holiday traditions or beliefs may be, keeping a positive memory of your loved one can help to lessen your sadness. While nothing can erase the pain completely, there are things you can do to make the holidays less stressful. Here are a few suggestions to assist you in taking positive steps toward feeling better during the holiday season and throughout the New Year as well.

**Accept Changes:** Be careful not to set expectations too high for yourself. Expecting things to be the same or go a particular way will likely lead to disappointment. Consider starting a new tradition, such as a donation of some kind in your loved one's memory or lighting a candle in their honor. Include the deceased in your conversations and celebrations. Once others sense you are comfortable doing so, they may share stories that will add to your pleasant memories. If thought to be helpful, change the times, locations and/or menus of traditional meals or perhaps replace a dinner at home with dining out.

**Plan Ahead:** Being caught by surprise can create added anxiety. Prioritize what needs to be done and decide which things to let go. Think ahead. Sit down with family and talk through what you want to do for the holiday season. Do only what each family member can comfortably handle. Family get-togethers can be extremely difficult so be honest with each other about your feelings. There is no right or wrong way to handle the holidays. Some may wish to follow family traditions while others may choose to change things up.

Handling invitations to family or special events during the holidays often can be stressful. Family and friends will attempt to get you involved and reconnected but being emotionally fragile can make social interactions difficult. Plan ahead to help lessen any anxiety these events may bring. For instance, if hesitant say "Maybe... I'll see how I'm feeling". That provides for the opportunity not to attend should the day of the event not be a good day for you.

**Set Limits:** Do only those things that are very special or important to you. What you choose to do the first year, you do not have to do the next year. Try to find a balance. Consider what you want to do this season as well as what you don't need to do this holiday season. Spend time with others, but also find time to reflect on your own thoughts and fully appreciate your memories.

In conclusion, remember that it's okay to do something for you! Purchase something just for you, do something you've never done before, enjoy a simple pleasure or attempt a new adventure. Try to give your own life a degree of meaning and value during this difficult time in your life.